

EDITION 22: AUTUMN 2015 - Simple, current and important news for Octavia residents

UPDATE NEWSLETTER

CHANGES AHEAD FOR RESIDENTS AND LANDLORDS

How the Government's policy and budget announcements might affect you.



Benefit changes

In July of this year, the Government announced its new Budget, which included some big changes in the benefits system that are likely to put further financial pressure on many working age residents.

Most of the changes will start in April 2016 and include reductions in Child Tax Credits and working age benefits being frozen for four years. The "Benefit Cap" is also being reduced from £500 per week to £452 per week for non-working households with children but

couples with three or more children are most likely to be affected.

The Government is also continuing with its plans to roll out Universal Credit, starting with single claimants. Anyone claiming benefits will receive one benefit payment directly into their bank account and they will be responsible for making rent payments to their landlords. If you are moved onto Universal Credit please let us know so we are aware of your changed circumstances.

If you would like to know more about how the welfare benefit might impact upon you or are currently finding it difficult to make ends meet, please contact your Income Officer. We also have two Citizens Advice Bureau surgeries every week on Thursdays and Fridays where you can access free independent advice on debt and benefit issues. In 2014/15 the CAB obtained over £23,000 in extra benefits for our residents. No appointment is necessary for the CAB drop in sessions which are run from 9.30am to 12.30pm on Thursdays (Debt Advice) and Fridays (Welfare Benefits Advice).

Rent reductions

The government has also announced proposals that will see the rents of social housing tenants reduce by 1% a year from April 2016 for the next four years. It has also said that it is considering a separate scheme to apply after 2017 that will mean residents on higher incomes will pay more and that it is considering introducing legislation requiring associations like Octavia to give tenants the right to buy. At this stage the detail of the various schemes have not been announced but once they are we will let you know.

What do you think of this newsletter?

Let us know at: E_update@octavia.org.uk

Contact us

Repairs:

T 0800 479 0011 (freephone)

Customer Services:

T 020 8354 5500 E info@octavia.org.uk

W www.octaviahousing.org.uk

Reflections on Octavia Hill's ambition of nobility for all

What does it mean to live a noble life?

We are publishing a book titled *A Life More Noble* to mark the 150th anniversary of the year that our founder, Octavia Hill, acquired her first property to let to poor Londoners. The book has contributions from Octavia residents and staff members alongside high-profile contributors such as Ian Hislop, the Rt Hon. Alan Johnson MP, Tamsin Greig, Deborah Meaden and Grayson Perry.

It explores a phrase Octavia used to describe her ambition in life: to

'make individual life noble, homes happy and family life good'.

Is that mission still relevant 150 years on? We have gathered a number of pieces from different contributors who give their views on Octavia's mission in today's society. We think it's still relevant, but do you?

Buy the book now on Amazon, at Octavia Foundation charity shops or at selected bookshops including Daunt Books and Notting Hill Bookshop. It's only £9.99 - and all proceeds are going to the Octavia Foundation to fund activities for young people in Kensington and Chelsea.

Thank you to all those residents who contributed to the book.

Visit our website lifemore noble.co.uk to find out more.



Octavia Hill was a woman well ahead of her time because she looked at life holistically and saw how home life, the great outdoors, mobility and autonomy each played a part in producing responsible citizens.'

(Dorothy, resident)

BE INVOLVED

Contact Anna de Souza, Resident Involvement
020 8354 5674 or anna.desouza@octavia.org

Residents helping to make a difference in the area of repairs

Residents have been helping to make a difference by attending focus groups and providing their recommendations on how to improve the repairs service. We have held two repairs focus groups this year with previously uninvolved residents who were either satisfied or dissatisfied with their last repair or had raised an expression of dissatisfaction.

Some of the key areas which arose from the focus group included:

- Better quality control
- Poor diagnosis of a repair
- Improved telephone diagnosis
- Missed appointments
- Improved communication regarding repairs requiring more than one appointment.

Key recommendations included issuing operatives with a password for use when visiting vulnerable residents, running a campaign to inform residents of the proper use of waste and drainage systems and

an improved understanding of the repairs service.

The focus group reports were shared with Asset Management who presented an action plan to the Tenant Steering Group. Resident Inspectors will be involved in testing services and by carrying out quality control checks. Look out for future updates from our Resident Inspectors.

TSG AGM on 25 November 2015 - Come and meet your Tenant Steering Group

Please look out for your Tenant Steering Group AGM invitation, which has been included as an insert with this newsletter. Come and find out more about what the TSG have been doing this year and what they have achieved. A resident 'drop in surgery' will be held from 5:30-6:15pm where representatives from the Neighbourhood, Asset Management, Estate Services, Lettings and Income teams will be present to answer tenants individual questions. The AGM will be held at the Octavia offices from

6:15pm-8pm.

The importance of local resident involvement

Octavia have hosted a number of local events this year as well in a range of local schemes including Pulton Place in Fulham, Lampton Road in Hounslow, Illumina House in Wandsworth, Southwark Residents Meeting, a Bourbon Lane improvement session in Shepherds Bush and we have also worked closely with our Resident Associations who have organised their own fun days, meetings and social gatherings. Brightwells and Lowlands in Fulham held their summer lawn party in August and enjoyed some tasty refreshments in the hot summer sun and enjoyed socialising with their friends. Three generations of Brightwells and Lowlands residents (pictured right) were represented at the summer party with original tenants, their children and their grandchildren attending the event.

Peel House held their end of summer event in September and the event was a huge success

BECOME A VOLUNTEER BEFRIENDER AND CHANGE LIVES



- Do you like working with people?
- Would you like to develop your experience and skills?
- Or maybe you simply want to make a difference in your community?

You might just be our next volunteer!

Octavia Foundation has expanded its befriending service into the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. The project supports older and vulnerable adults in the borough. Being a befriender with us is a fantastic opportunity to reach out to isolated individuals and have a direct positive impact on their lives. We match volunteer

befrienders to spend an hour a week with the individual and we ask for a commitment of six months.

Befriending can involve a range of activities from having a chat to going for a walk. We need our volunteers to be empathetic, reliable and supportive. If this sounds like you please get in contact.

If you are interested in finding out more about the role please email volunteering@octaviafoundation.org.uk or call Raksha on **0208 354 5532**

If you would like to apply please visit our website www.octaviafoundation.org.uk and click on the link below **www.octaviafoundation.org.uk/volunteer/apply_now**

(Travel expenses will be covered)

ement Manager:
a.org.uk or visit our website.



with over 50 residents from the mixed tenure scheme getting together to enjoy home cooked food and children's games with their neighbours. Ed Lewis, Chair of the Resident Association said "The association feels that these events are crucial as they encourage residents to meet their neighbours and inspire a sense of community."

If you would like some support to set up or host a local resident event please do get in touch with our Resident Involvement Manager.



Know anyone who could benefit from extra care housing?

Last month, our brand new state of the art extra care facility for older people in Hounslow, Park Lodge House opened.

The first residents have already moved in and are settling in exceptionally well.

'I haven't seen Dad look this happy and relaxed in ages' (Julie, daughter)

As with all our extra care schemes, the aim of this state of the art facility is to support residents to live independently in a safe, accessible and secure environment – to strengthen their social lives and family relationships, reducing loneliness, institutional care and the need for overnight hospital care.

Park Lodge has been specifically designed to cater to the needs of older residents, especially those with dementia. Fixtures and fittings have been colour coordinated to provide contrast and help residents with sensory impairment or dementia get their bearings.

If you know someone who is 50 years or older, living in the borough of Hounslow and could benefit from extra care housing then it is worth contacting the scheme on **020 8354 5586** or email enquiries@octavia.org.uk for further information.



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Getting to Know You Visits



Our Neighbourhood Team routinely carry out 'Getting to Know You' home visits to our residents. The purpose of the visit is so that your Neighbourhood Officer can introduce themselves and to inform you of all the other services that Octavia provides, which you might not be aware of. These include:

- Welfare Benefits and Debt Advice
- Employment and Training Services
- Applying for Charitable Grants
- Bidding for Estate Improvements

Our Officers will also answer any general tenancy queries and help to chase up any outstanding repairs that you might have.

During the Getting to Know You visit, our officers will complete a form to ensure that the information we hold on our computerised records are correct and up-to-date.

In the last financial year, we carried out in excess of 400 home visits and were able to assist a number of tenants by making referrals to a range of services to help them sustain their tenancy.

When will I have a Getting to Know You Visit?

The Neighbourhood Officers normally plan their visits by targeting different streets or estates. They will normally write to you in advance advising you that they will be visiting. However, if you would like to request a Getting to Know You visit sooner, you can contact your Neighbourhood Officer on: [020 8354 5500](tel:02083545500).

HAVE YOU USED OUR PC'S?



Get **FREE** internet access at our head office and check what's happening online at www.octaviahousing.org.uk

- Access your rent account or pay your rent online
- Report a repair
- Find out how you can benefit from a range of services as an Octavia tenant
- Keep up to date with any changes to the benefits system
- Apply for jobs or search for mutual exchange partners

The internet has endless benefits and you can try it out for free at Emily House, Kensal Road.

Our performance

We closely monitor performance in all areas of our work in order to improve. A summary of how we are doing in key areas is below. We are doing well in a number of areas, and will be looking to improve on how quickly we let void properties.

Performance indicator	July 2015	Target	Rating
Rent arrears as % rent due (general needs)	5.06%	4.8%	☹️
Rent collection as % of rent due (general needs)	99.5%	100.1%	☹️
Standard voids – average re-let time in days (year to date)	27	20	☹️
% of emergency repairs completed within target time	100%	99%	😊
% of urgent repairs completed within target time	100%	98%	😊
% of routine repairs completed within target time	96.6%	98%	☹️
% responses to anti-social behaviour reports within target time	100%	95%	😊
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (switchboard)	5	14	😊
Average speed of phone calls pick up in seconds (repairs line)	13	14	😊
% responses to complaints within target time	91%	99%	☹️
Satisfaction with Octavia's overall service (from completed repairs survey)	89%	95%	☹️

Our office opening hours over Christmas

Thursday 24 December
Normal service from 9am – 4pm

Christmas day and Boxing day **Office closed**

Monday 28 to Thursday 31 December
Telephone emergency service only

Friday 1 January 2016 **Office closed**

Monday 4 January **Normal service resumes**

Please note that if you have an emergency over the festive period, our out of hours emergency repairs service will still be running. Please dial 020 8354 5500 for any emergencies.



Please contact us if you need any part of this information in Braille, on audio tape or explained in a different language.

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